

HAND OF FATE

THE HAND OF

FASTE

JUNE
10c

No. 23

RUN, RUN! WE CAN WAIT!
WE'VE WAITED YEARS... AND
SOON YOU MUST STOP TO
REST... SOON WE WILL GET
REVENGE FOR YOUR BETRAYING
US INTO DEATH!



WEB COMIC UNIVERSE.COM



INTRODUCING Comfo-Gard

THE AMAZING NEW MENSTRUAL SHIELD THAT GIVES
SURE, SAFE PROTECTION DIFFERENTLY

Yes, here it is—look at the illustration and see at once why Comfo-Gard is different. Comfo-Gard looks like and is an abbreviated pantie—except Comfo-Gard is especially cut to hug the body contours. Comfo-Gard is made of finest fabric and elastic materials and is lined with sheerest, softest rubber to make it liquid repellent.

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Comfo-Gard eliminates pins and hooks. "No-slip" loops hold the napkin securely without pins or hooks. You'll enjoy this extra freedom from annoyances.

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2 FOR
\$1 98

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Please rush two (2) Comfo-Gards in a plain package. I will pay postman only \$1.98 plus postage. If not satisfied after 60 days I may return the Comfo-Gards for a full refund of the purchase price.

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Check here if you enclose \$1.98 and we pay postage. Name enclosed after holds.

OF ALL THE PROFESSIONS IN THE WORLD, ALBERT TORRANCE... YOURS IS THE LOWEST, THE MOST DESPICABLE OF ALL! TO BE A GRAVE-ROBBER, A MAN MUST BE WITHOUT CONSCIENCE, WITHOUT MORALS, WITHOUT DECENCY! THAT DESCRIPTION FITS YOU PERFECTLY, DOESN'T IT, ALBERT? BECAUSE YOU ARE A SCAVENGER OF THE DEAD... A GHOUl OF THE GRAVEYARD! YOU ARE...

HE WHO ROBS the DEAD

YEAH... SURE I ROB THE DEAD! WHY NOT? THEY AIN'T GOT NO USE FOR THE LI'L TRINKETS I TAKE OFF 'EM! BUT I HAVE... AN' THE DEAD ARE GONNA MAKE ME RICH SOME DAY — SO RICH I WON'T EVEN LOOK AT JUNK — LIKE GOLD AND DIAMONDS!

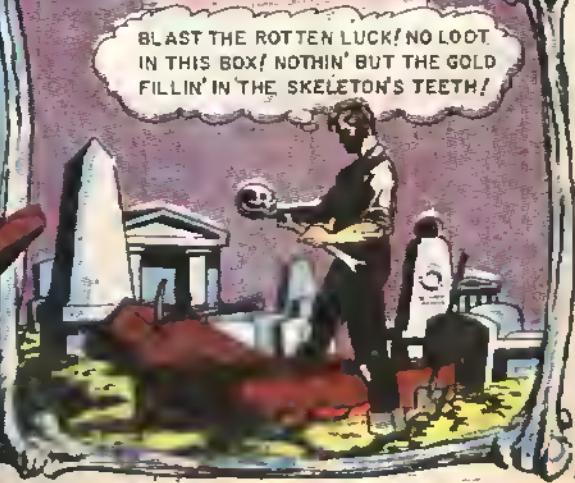


YOU HAVE NO RESPECT FOR THE DEAD, DO YOU, ALBERT? YOU THINK ONLY OF ONE THING AS YOUR CALLOUSED HANDS CLAW AT THE LID OF THE COFFIN YOU HAVE DUG UP.

AT LAST IT'S OPEN! HOLLOW EYES STARE AT YOU OUT OF A BLEACHED SKULL AS IF SHOCKED AT YOUR BLASPHEMY OF THE DEAD...

MAYBE THIS IS THE BIG STRIKE! MAYBE THIS COFFIN IS LOADED WITH FAMILY JEWELS!

BLAST THE ROTTEN LUCK! NO LOOT IN THIS BOX! NOTHIN' BUT THE GOLD FILLIN' IN THE SKELETON'S TEETH!



SURE YOU TAKE THE GOLD FILLINGS OUT OF THE SKULL'S JAWS, ALBERT! AFTER ALL, YOU'VE GOT A REPUTATION TO LIVE UP TO... NO CONSCIENCE, NO MORALS, NO DECENCY, HEH, ALBERT?

YEAH... AN' NO DOUGH! I'LL NEVER MAKE MY PILE IF ALL THE STIFFS I DIG UP HAVE AS LI'L AS THIS ONE HAD! IT DON'T EVEN PAY FOR MY DIGGIN' AN' COVERIN' UP TIME!



AFTER A HARD NIGHT'S WORK YOU LIKE TO RELAX IN YOU SHACK, DON'T YOU, ALBERT? AND YOU RELAX BY DROOLING OVER YOUR TREASURES FROM THE TOMBS...

BRACELETS, STICKPINS, RINGS GOLD COINS... YEAH, IT ALL MAKES A NICE PILE.



ANOTHER NIGHT... ANOTHER GRAVE, HUM, ALBERT? YOUR SPADE STABS INTO THE SOFT CEMETERY SOIL AND WITH EVERY SHOVELFUL YOU TRY TO IMAGINE WHAT TREASURE LIES BURIED IN THE CASKET BELOW...

COULD BE ONE OF THOSE CRAZY OL' DAMES WHO WANTED TO BE BURIED WITH ALL HER JEWELRY!



YOUR THOUGHTS ARE MENTAL - SHOTS OF MORPHINE AND THEY FORCE YOU TO DIG WITH A FRENZY SPANNED ONLY OF GREED...

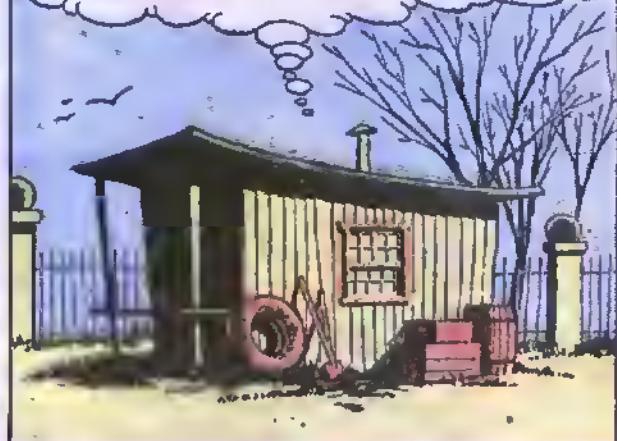
AH-H! I'VE HIT THE CASKET! THIS MUST'A BEEN A FRESH GRAVE AN' THE DIGGIN' WAS EASY!



I BETTER GET BACK TO MY SHACK NOW! THE SUN'S STARTIN' TO COME UP... AN' I DON'T WANNA GET CAUGHT AROUND HERE.



BUT IT AIN'T ENOUGH... NOT FOR TEN YEARS OF DIGGIN' IT AIN'T! I WANNA STRIKE IT RICH BEFORE I RETIRE... A CASKET LOADED WITH FAMILY JEWELS! AND I WILL, ONE OF THESE NIGHTS... I WILL!



BUT SUDDENLY SOMETHING UNUSUAL HAPPENS, DOESN'T IT, ALBERT? VERY UNUSUAL...

HELP! THE CASKET AN' THE GRAVE CAVED IN! I'M FALLING... H-E-L-P!



YES, ALBERT... YOU'RE FALLING, TWISTING, SPINNING... DOWN... DOWN... DOWN! BUT ALL YOUR YELLING AND PLEADING WON'T HELP YOU/DOWN... DOWN, YOU GO, ALBERT...

OKAY, YOU CAN OPEN YOUR EYES NOW, ALBERT... AND CUT OUT THAT SCREAMING! YOU'VE STOPPED FALLING...

YEAH! I-I HAVE! BUT WHERE AM I? AN' WHO ARE THESE CHARACTERS WALKING AROUND HERE?



YOU'RE PUZZLED AND FRIGHTENED, AREN'T YOU, ALBERT? BUT WHY? THEY AREN'T BOTHERING YOU... THEY'RE NOT EVEN LOOKING AT YOU... SO WHY BE SCARED?

I--I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS SLIMY PLACE IS... BUT I GOTTA GET OUTTA HERE. THERE MUST BE A WAY OUT!



YOUR EYES BULGE... YOUR TEMPLES THROB AT THE SIGHT/GREED AND DESIRE RE-PLACE YOUR FEAR! THIS IS IT, HUH, ALBERT? THIS IS THE RICH STRIKE YOU'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF...

CA-RIES / JEWELS OF ALL KINDS... / RINGS, BRACELETS, NECKLACES! YEAH! THIS IS IT ALL RIGHT! MY RICH STRIKE AT LAST!



GREED DROPS YOU TO YOUR KNEES!
YOU GRAB AND CLAW AT THE GEMS...
YOU LET THE COOL GOLD METAL AND
SPARKLING STONES RUN THRU YOUR
FINGERS...

IT'S REAL/ REAL GOLD, DIAMONDS AND
EMERALDS/AN' IT'S ALL LAYIN' AROUND
HERE LIKE TRASH/ THEM CREEPS MUST
BE CRAZY...THEY DON'T SEEM TO CARE
ABOUT THIS STUFF AT ALL.

HEY, YOU!
CAN I HAVE
A FEW OF
THESE?

TAKE ALL YOU
DESIRE! WE
HAVE NO USE
FOR THEM.

HE DOESN'T HAVE TO TELL YOU TWICE,
HUM, ALBERT? YOU STUFF YOUR
POCKETS WITH SO MUCH OF THAT LOOT
YOU CAN HAROLY MOVE...



YES, THERE IS A WAY
OUT...THE SAME WAY
YOU CAME IN!

YOU MEAN I GOTTA CLIMB
UP THAT SLIMY HOLE I
FELL THRU?



IT'S A LONG WAY UP FROM
THE BOTTOM, ISN'T IT,
ALBERT? BUT YOU DIG YOUR
FINGERS INTO THE SLIMY
WALLS AND START...

YOU SLIP AND SLIDE...
BUT YOU CLING TO THE
MUDDY SIDES LIKE A
LIZARD...

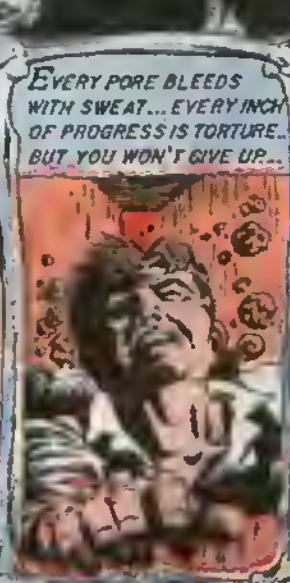


GRAVES ARE THE ONLY
ENTRANCES...AND THE ONLY
EXITS/ BUT WHY LEAVE?
YOU'LL BE BACK...EVERY-
ONE COMES HERE...
SOONER OR LATER!

NOT THIS BABY/ ONCE
I SCRAM OUTTA HERE
I'M STAYIN' OUT. AN'
NOTHIN' CAN MAKE ME
COME BACK!



EVERY PORE BLEEDS
WITH SWEAT...EVERY INCH
OF PROGRESS IS TORTURE.
BUT YOU WON'T GIVE UP...



AND A THOUSAND
AGONIES LATER, YOU SEE
THE NIGHT...THE STARS...

I MADE IT!
I'M OUT OF
THE GRAVE!



WHEN YOU GET BACK TO YOUR SHACK YOU'RE SO EXCITED YOU CAN'T SLEEP, CAN YOU, ALBERT? SO YOU SPEND THE NIGHT COUNTING, SORTING, ADMIRING...

YOU'RE THE FIRST CUSTOMER AT THE JEWEL BROKER... AND AS HE STICKS THE LOUPE INTO HIS EYE AND EXAMINES YOUR JEWELRY YOU SEE A LOOK OF AMAZEMENT AND SHOCK ON HIS PALE FACE...

YEAH... AH' AS SOON AS IT GETS LIGHT OUT AN' THE STORES OPEN... I'M GONNA SELL THIS STUFF.

AMAZINGLY FINE PIECES... ALL OF THESE BRACELETS, RINGS AND NECKLACES. WHERE'D YOU ACQUIRE THEM?

NONE OF YOUR BLASTED BUSINESS! DO YOU WANNA BUY THEM OR DON'T YOU? THERE ARE OTHER BROKERS IN THIS TOWN, YA KNOW.

THAT LAST CRACK OF MINE MADE HIM QUIT STALLIN'... AN' HE GAVE ME A GOOD PRICE FOR 'EM! HA! LOOK AT THE GREEN STUFF! I'M RICH... RICH!

YEP, YOU'RE ALL SET NOW, AREN'T YOU, ALBERT? YOU'RE ROLLING IN DOUGH! NEW CLOTHES, GOOD FOOD, GIRLS... EVERYTHING YOU NEVER HAD! YOU'RE REALLY LIVING NOW.



BUT YOUR NEW LIFE IS ONLY A WEEK OLD WHEN THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR OF YOUR APARTMENT... A KNOCK THAT EXPLODES YOUR LITTLE BUBBLE...

THE POLICE!

THAT'S HIM, LIEUTENANT... THAT'S THE MAN WHO SOLD ME THE JEWELRY.

OKAY, ALBERT TORRANCE... YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

FOR WHAT? ITAIN'T NO CRIME TO SELL JEWELRY!

IT IS WHEN IT'S STOLEN JEWELRY! THAT STUFF YOU SOLD WAS TAKEN FROM THE HOME OF MRS. FLORENCE VAN CLIVE IN A ROBBERY A WEEK AGO!

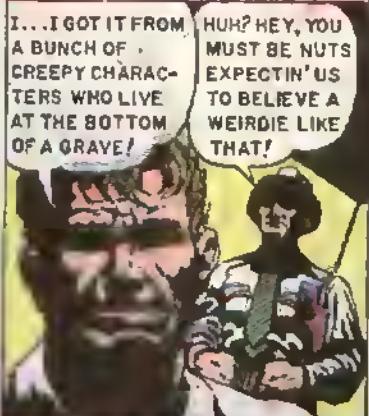


THAT'S A LIE!
THIS IS A FRAME-
UP/I DIDN'T
STEAL THAT
JEWELRY!

THEN WHERE'D
YOU GET IT...
WIN IT ON A
PINBALL
MACHINE?

GO AHEAD, ALBERT... TELL THEM!
TELL THEM THE TRUTH! THEY'LL
THINK YOU'RE CRAZY... BUT THAT'S
BETTER THAN GOING TO JAIL FOR
ROBBERY...

OKAY, LET'S
GO... THIS
I'VE GOT TO
SEE.



IT'S THE TRUTH, I TELL
YA/AN' I CAN PROVE IT!
I'LL TAKE YOU RIGHT TO
THE SPOT WHERE I GOT
THE STUFF!

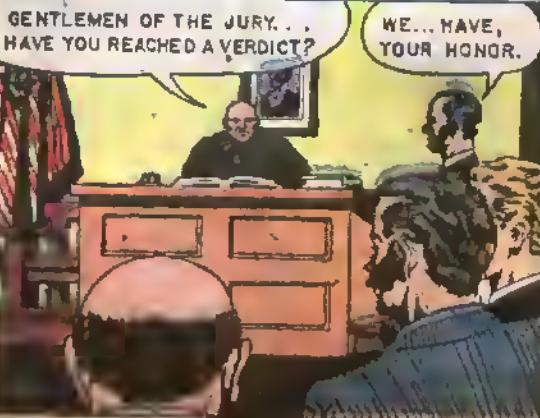


THE POLICE SIRENS SCREAM LIKE BANSHEES
AS THEY SPEED YOU TO THE CEMETERY/ AND
WHEN YOU GET THERE, YOU RUN TOWARD THE
PLACE WHERE YOU DUG THAT NIGHT...

THAT'S IT... RIGHT THERE! THAT'S
WHERE I GOT THE JEWELRY FROM AND...
HOLY SMOKES / NO... NO!



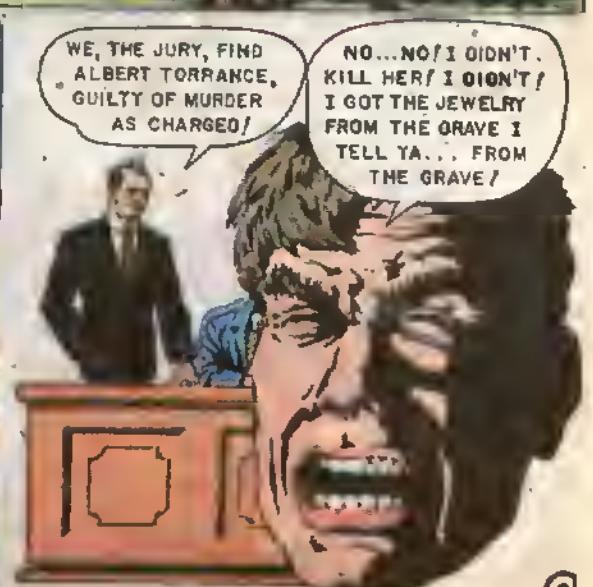
YOU BEG AND YOU PLEAD... BUT IT'S A WASTE OF
BREATH, ALBERT! THE TOMBSTONES ARE STACKED
AGAINST YOU, BUT THERE'S STILL A CHANCE... A
LAST CHANCE! MAYBE THE JURY AT YOUR TRIAL WILL
BELIEVE YOUR FANTASTIC STORY...



WE... HAVE,
YOUR HONOR.

WE, THE JURY, FIND
ALBERT TORRANCE,
GUILTY OF MURDER
AS CHARGED!

NO... NO! I DIDN'T
KILL HER! I DIDN'T!
I GOT THE JEWELRY
FROM THE GRAVE I
TELL YA... FROM
THE GRAVE!



THAT MONTH IN THE DEATH
HOUSE WAS MURDER,
WASN'T IT, ALBERT? YOU'RE
ALMOST GLAD TO BE WALK-
ING THE LAST MILE...

I GOT IT FROM
THE GRAVE!

YOU KEEP SAYING THAT
ALL THE WAY TO THE
CHAIR... AND EVEN AS
THEY STRAP AND CAP YOU!

I GOT IT
FROM
THE GRAVE!

YOU SAY IT FOR THE LAST
TIME AS A SWITCH IS
PULLED AND 4,000 VOLTS
OF HADES BURN YOUR
INSIDES.

THEN TWO MORE JOLTS,
ALBERT... AND YOU'LL
NEVER ROB THE DEAD
AGAIN...

...I GOT IT
OW-W-W---
FROM THE
THE GRAVE!

THIS IS ONE TIME, ALBERT, THAT SOME-
BODY ELSE DUG A GRAVE FOR YOU...

UT SUDDENLY, YOU'RE NOT IN THE CASKET ANYMORE, ARE YOU
ALBERT?

I—I CAN'T BE DEAD! LOOK AT ME...
I'M WALKIN'! I'M NOT IN A COFFIN!
AN'THIS PLACE... I RECOGNIZE IT!
I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE!

SURE YOU HAVE, ALBERT! LOOK OVER THERE...
REMEMBER THAT PILE OF JEWELRY? REMEMBER HOW
YOU HELPED YOURSELF TO ALL YOU COULD CARRY?

SURE... I REMEMBER! BUT
FUNNY... I AIN'T INTERESTED
IN THAT STUFF ANYMORE.

THAT IS WHERE THE
SPIRITS CAST THEIR
WORDLY TRINKETS
WHEN THEY COME
TO THIS LAND
BEYOND LIFE!

AND NOW YOU KNOW WHY YOU AREN'T INTERESTED
IN THE GOLD AND DIAMONDS ANYMORE, DON'T YOU,
ALBERT?

YEAH... WHAT GOOD
ARE GOLD AND DIAMONDS
TO A GHOST?

THE END

A Hand of FATE Mystery

#31

THE "AFFAIR OF THE BLACK ROSE" WAS A TRUE CASE OF THE SUPERNATURAL THAT TOOK PLACE IN ENGLAND WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD AND FEUDS COMMON AMONG NOBLE FAMILIES. A LONG-STANDING FEUD HAD JUST COME TO AN END WHEN A CLAN CAPITULATED TO A POWERFUL BLOOD ENEMY. THE DEFEAT ENDED THE REIGN OF THE FAMILY OF THE "BLACK ROSE".

MY TERMS ARE THESE. YOU MUST VACATE THIS CASTLE AND LEAVE ENGLAND. IF NOT, YOU DIE!

I HAVE NO CHOICE, BUT, SIR WILLIAM, THE "BLACK ROSE" WILL Avenge ME! A REVENGE OF DEATH ON YOUR FAMILY!

SIR WILLIAM BECAME MASTER OF THE "BLACK ROSE" CASTLE, SO NAMED FOR THE PHENOMENAL ROSE THAT GREW ALONG SIDE THE CASTLE WALL.

AH! THIS DEVILISH PLANT TEARS AT MY CLOTHES! PERHAPS THE CURSE OF THE BLACK ROSE HAS MEANING . . .

SIR WILLIAM HAD THE GROUNDS COVERED WITH GRAVEL AND THE BLACK ROSE DESTROYED TO PREVENT THE CURSE FROM COMING TRUE. IN TIME THE CURSE WAS FORGOTTEN. BUT CENTURIES LATER, AN ANCESTOR OF SIR WILLIAM BECAME HEIR TO THE CASTLE . . .

CLEAR THIS GRAVEL AND SEED THE GROUNDS! I WANT GRASS AND FLOWERS TO GROW HERE AGAIN!

SOON THE AREA WAS GREEN EXCEPT FOR A HUGE BLACK ROSE THAT HAD MYSTERIOUSLY BLOOMED . . .

STRANGE! THIS BLACK ROSE . . . I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT! ITS THORNS ARE AS SHARP AS BLADES!

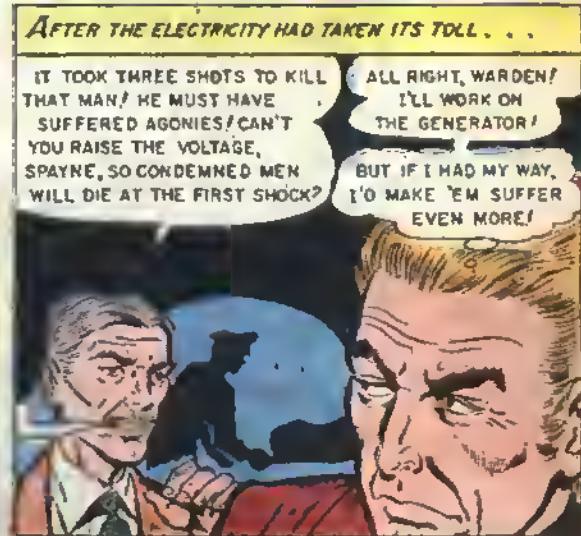
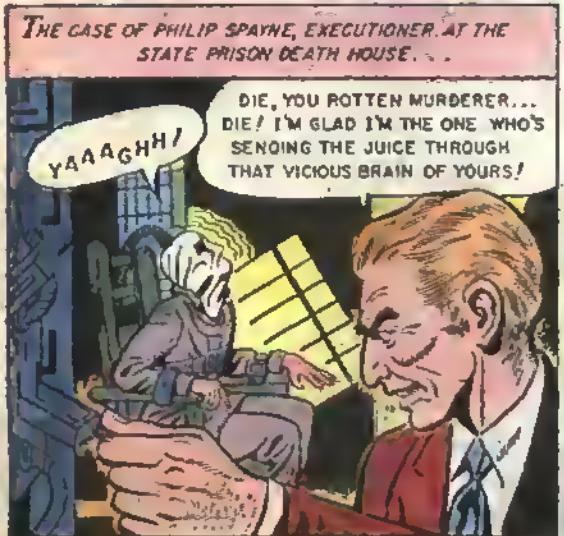
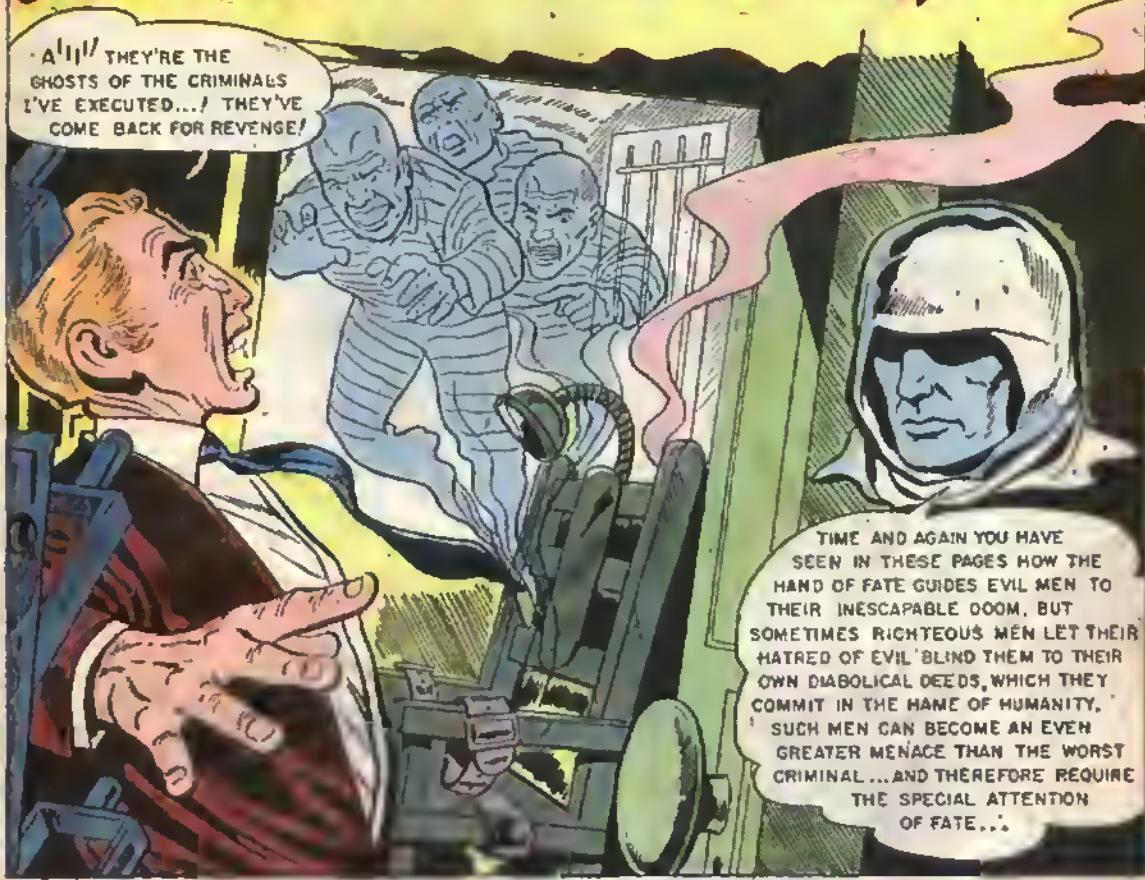
THAT NIGHT, SIR WILLIAM'S DESCENDANT WAS AWAKENED BY A HORRIBLE SIGHT COMING THROUGH HIS BEDROOM WINDOW

WHA . . . ? THE BLACK ROSE! IT'S ALIVE! CREEPING TOWARDS ME! AAAAHHHH!

THE SCREAMS BROUGHT SERVANTS TO THE BEDROOM WHERE THEY FOUND THEIR MASTER WITH THE SINEWY TENTACLES OF THE BLACK ROSE WRAPPED AROUND HIM. THE SHARP THORNS HAD PIERCED HIS BODY LIKE A THOUSAND KNIVES! THE ROSE ITSELF HAD BECOME A MASS OF WITHERED PETALS, ITS TASK OF CENTURIES-OLD CURSE COMPLETED.

THE END

SHATTERING THE TIME BARRIER



A LOT OF CRIMINALS ARE TOO CUNNING TO BE CAUGHT! WHEN WE CATCH BAD ONES, THEY SHOULD BE TORTURED TO DEATH AS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS!

BEHOLD, HOW LITTLE THINGS AFFECT THE DESTINIES OF MEN!



IF PHILIP SPAYNE HAD NOT BEEN SO ABSORBED IN HIS THOUGHTS, HE WOULD NOT HAVE ABSENT-MINDEDLY CONNECTED SOME WIRES IN AN UNUSUAL WAY...

BUT I'VE GOT TO FOLLOW THE WARDEN'S ORDERS! WELL, LET'S SEE HOW MUCH I'VE STEPPED UP THE VOLTAGE...



WHAAA! I MUST'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG! THE CURRENT SHOULDN'T HAVE JUMPED AN ARC LIKE THAT!

CRACK

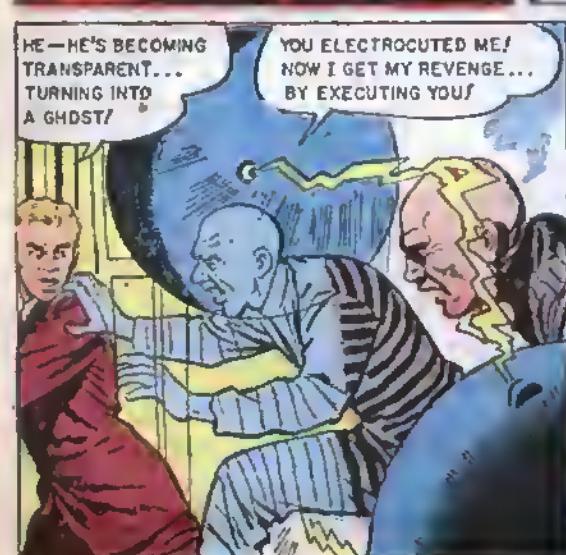


I—I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! THERE SEEMS TO BE A STRANGE NEW WORLD ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THOSE ARCS! AND GREAT SCOTT...! THERE'S THAT CRIMINAL I ELECTROCUTED AN HOUR AGO---FOLLOWED BY A GANG OF OTHER EXECUTED KILLERS!



HE—HE'S BECOMING TRANSPARENT... TURNING INTO A GHST!

YOU ELECTROCUTED ME! NOW I GET MY REVENGE... BY EXECUTING YOUS



YOU'LL NEVER GET ME, YOU FIEND! AAHH! THAT WRENCH WENT RIGHT THROUGH HIS BODY!

NOTHING YOU CAN DO WILL STOP ME! BUT THIS LENGTH OF WIRE WILL FINISH YOU... WHEN I WRAP IT AROUND YOUR NECK!





THEY'VE DISAPPEARED! BUT NOW I KNOW HOW TO GET RID OF THEM—BY TURNING THE CURRENT OFF! SO I'LL JUST TURN IT ON AGAIN AND TRY TO FIND OUT WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT!

TAKE HEED, MORTAL! DISCONNECT YOUR WIRING—FORGET THAT ALL THIS EVER HAPPENED!

IT IS DANGEROUS TO DELVE INTO SUCH SECRETS...NOT BECAUSE YOU ARE EVIL, BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE SO FANATICAL ABOUT YOUR OWN IDEAS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS!

IF YOU'RE TRYING TO STOP ME, YOU MUST BE A CREATURE OF EVIL! I DON'T TAKE ADVICE FROM THE LIKES OF YOU!

AND SPAYNE THREW THE SWITCH...

AH, THE CURRENT JUMPED THE ARCS AGAIN...BUT THERE'S A BATTLE GOING ON IN THAT WEIRD WORLD NOW!



I'VE GOT TO FIGHT EVIL, NO MATTER WHERE IT TAKES PLACE! BUT THOSE HIGH-VOLTAGE ARCS MUSTN'T TOUCH MY BODY, OR I'LL BE ELECTROCUTED INSTANTLY!

AH!! THE EVIL ONES HAVE BROKEN THROUGH OUR LINES!

PHILIP SPAYNE DID NOT STOP TO EXPLORE THE STRANGE WORLD HE FOUND HIMSELF IN, DRIVEN BY HATRED OF ALL THINGS EVIL, HE PICKED UP A CLUB AND RUSHED INTO THE FRAY...

WHAT'S HOLDING YOU GUYS UP? LET'S GET TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING AND GO ON A RAMPAGE OF MURDER!

THIS GHOSTS STOPPIN' US... AGHHS!

A GHOST! RUH FOR LIVES!

HUH? ME— A GHOST?

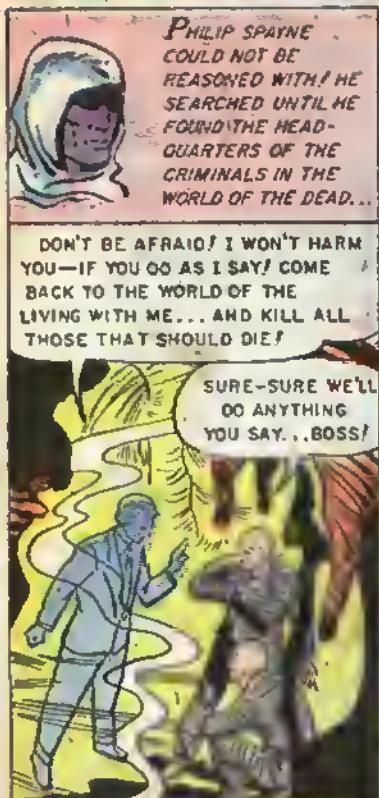
HOLY JUMP—I—I'M TRANSPARENT...! I CAN EXPLAIN THAT, MY FRIEND...

THIS IS THE WORLD OF THE DEAD! THE LIVING APPEAR AS GHOSTS HERE...JUST AS WE DEAD APPEAR AS SPIRITS IN YOUR WORLD! ORDINARILY, THE TWO WORLDS ARE ON DIFFERENT LEVELS, BUT SOMETHING APPARENTLY HAPPENED TO BRING THE TWO LEVELS INTO ALIGNMENT...

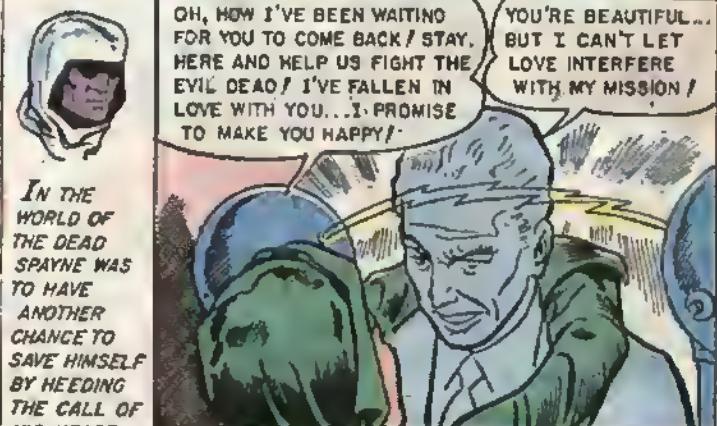
...SO NOW THE LIVING AND THE DEAD CAN ENTER EACH OTHER'S WORLD BY STEPPING BETWEEN THOSE FLAMING ARCS!

I GET IT! I MUST'VE ACCIDENTALLY HOOKED UP MY WIRES IN A NEW WAY, AND THE NEW FORCE FIELD MADE THE TWO WORLDS INTERSECT AT THE ARCS!

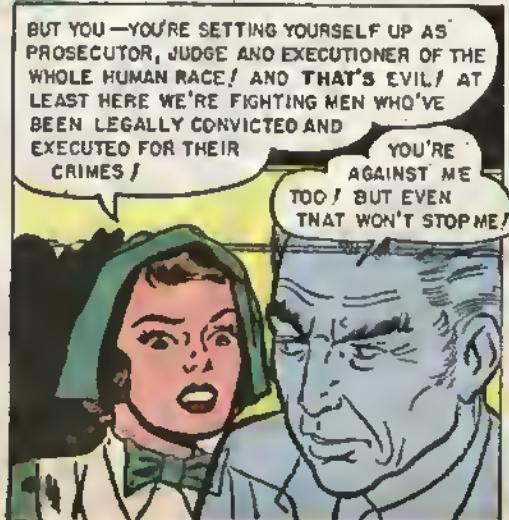




AND SO THE GHOSTLY HORDE SPREAD THROUGH THE WORLD ON ITS MISSION OF MURDER, OBEYING THE ORDERS OF A FANATIC WHOSE METHODS WERE THOSE OF THE VERY CRIMINALS AND DICTATORS HE WANTED TO DESTROY!



SPAYNE THEN TOLD THE GIRL HOW HE WAS FIGHTING EVIL IN THE WORLD OF THE LIVING... AND SHE DREW AWAY IN HORROR



WHEN PHILIP SPAYNE RETURNED
WITH A NEW BAND OF GHOSTLY
RECRUITS...

HERE'S A LIST OF MORE PEOPLE
I WANT KILLED! I'VE RUN OUT OF
KNOWN CRIMINALS AND DICTATORS,
SO HERE'S A LIST OF PEOPLE WHO
MIGHT GO BAD! THE WORLD WILL
BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT THEM!

POWER HAS MADE A
TYRANT OF HIM!

AFTER THE GHOSTS LEFT ON THEIR
MURDEROUS ASSIGNMENTS...

I'LL WIPE OUT
ALL THOSE WHO
OPPOSE MY
PLANS TO
IMPROVE THE
WORLD!

HOW CAN I STOP HIM?
WAIT...I HAVE SEEN
HIM STEP CAREFULLY
OVER THAT LOWER
ARC OF FIRE. WILL IT
STUN HIM AND
RESTORE HIM TO HIS
SENSES IF I PUSH
HIM INTO IT?

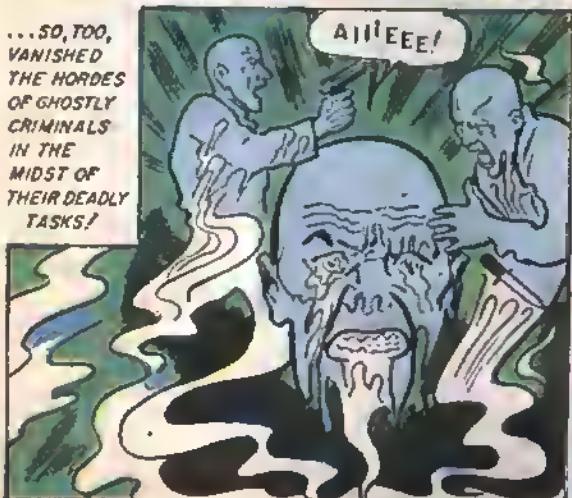
WHA--
HELP!



IN DEATH AS IN
LIFE, PHILIP
SPAYNE DESTROYED
WHATEVER HE
TOUCHED...FOR
HIS FALL DEMOL-
ISHED THE WIRING
HOOKUP THAT HAD
LED HIM TO HIS
FATE! AND AS THE
DOORWAY TO THE
WORLD OF THE DEAD
VANISHED...



...SO, TOO,
VANISHED
THE Hordes
OF GHOSTLY
CRIMINALS
IN THE
MIDST OF
THEIR DEADLY
TASKS!



WE'LL NEVER KNOW HOW
THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED...
WE COULDN'T POSSIBLY
RECONSTRUCT IT FROM
THAT MASS OF BURNED
TWISTED WIRING!

PHILIP SPAYNE,
EXECUTIONER...
ELECTROCUTED
BY HIS OWN HANDS!
WHAT AN IRONIC FATE!



THE END

A Hand of FATE Mystery

#32

IN THE FILES OF THE PARIS POLICE THERE CAN BE FOUND A CASE HISTORY OF A CRIME THAT OCCURRED OVER THIRTY YEARS AGO. TO THIS DAY AN AURA OF THE SUPERNATURAL STILL HANGS OVER IT. IN THE HOME OF A WEALTHY FAMILY, A MASQUERADE BALL WAS IN PROGRESS AS A SPURNED SUITOR OF THE HOSTESS PLOTTED MANIACALLY IN A DARK CORNER. JEAN PILLOT WAS PLANNING MURDER . . .

JULIA HAS GIVEN ME UP FOR ANOTHER MAN. SHE MUST DIE! MY PLAN IS PERFECT. NO ONE RECOGNIZES ME IN THIS COSTUME AND I AM SUPPOSED TO BE IN ROUEN TONIGHT! FITTING DISGUISE FOR A PERFECT CRIME!



SUDDENLY THE HALL WAS PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS. ABOVE THE STARTLED SHOUTS OF THE GUESTS CAME JULIA'S ANGUISHED SHRIEK! WHEN THE LIGHTS CAME ON AGAIN . . .



PILLOT WAS CAPTURED, BUT WHEN THEY TRIED REMOVE HIS SATANIC MAKEUP . . .

T-THE HORNS...! THEY WILL NOT COME OFF! THEY'RE REAL!

THESE FEATURES--ARE HIS! HE IS REALLY SATAN!

WHA...? THIS IS BUT A DISGUISE! I AM JEAN PILLOT!



UNABLE TO REMOVE THE HEINOUS FEATURES FROM HIS FACE, PILLOT BECAME TERROR-STRICKEN. HE RAN MADLY FROM THE HALL AND PLUNGED OUT OF A WINDOW FOUR STORIES OFF THE GROUND



PILLOT'S BODY LAMED ON A SPIKED FENCE AND HE WAS MORTALLY IMPALED . . .

THE POLICE -- CALL THE POLICE!



WHEN THE AUTHORITIES ARRIVED THEY WERE ASTONISHED TO FIND THE FIGURE OF THE DEVIL HANGING ON A SPIKE. MEDICAL SCIENCE COULD NOT EXPLAIN THE MACABRE TRANSFORMATION THAT OVERCAME JEAN PILLOT! THE BODY WAS CREMATED AND THE CASE FILED IN THE ANNALS OF THE UNEXPLAINABLE.

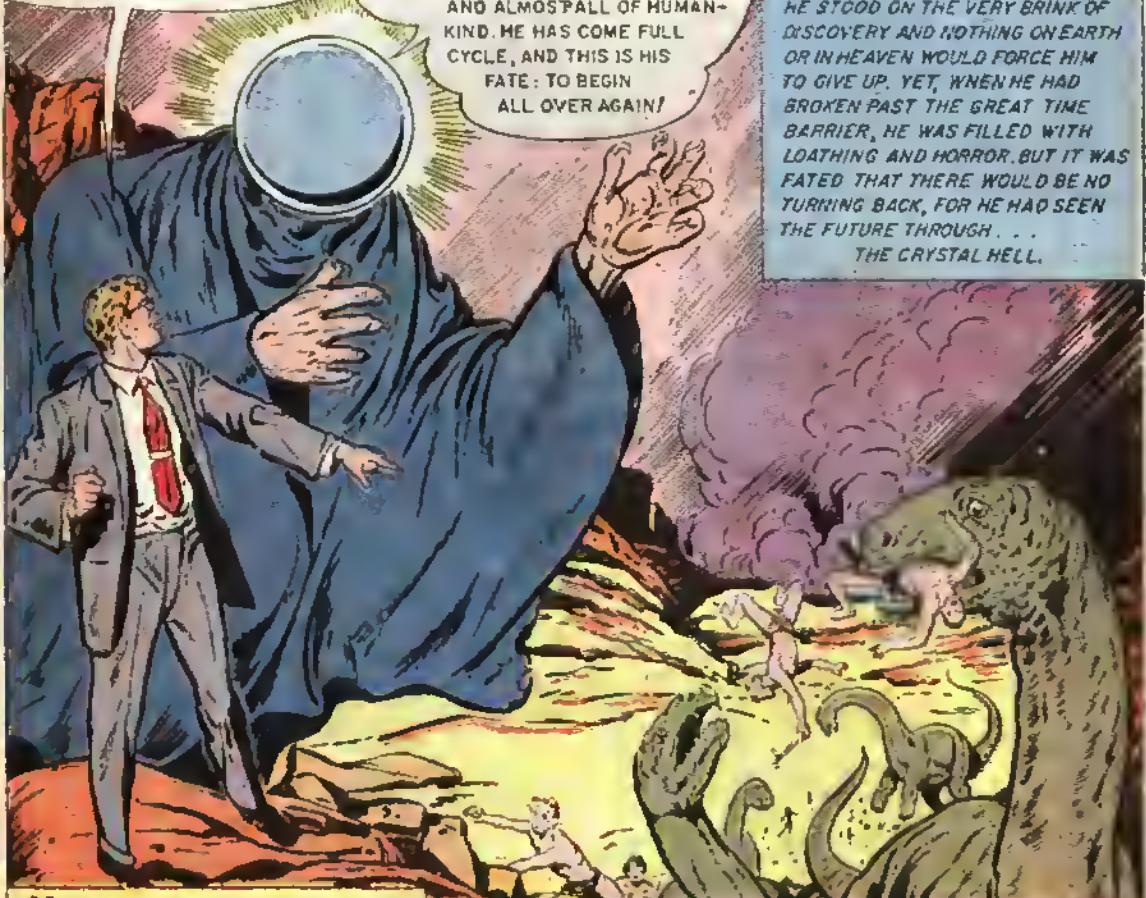
THE END

HELL beyond the Crystal ball

YOU LIED TO ME! THIS ISN'T THE FUTURE! THESE ARE PRIMITIVE TIMES! THOSE ANIMALS, THOSE MEN—THEY BELONG TO THE STONE AGE!

THIS IS THE FUTURE, MAX BRONISLAW! THE FUTURE FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS HENCE! THROUGH HIS OWN STUPIDITY, MAN DESTROYED THE GREAT WORKS HE HAD CREATED, AND ALMOST ALL OF HUMAN-KIND. HE HAS COME FULL CYCLE, AND THIS IS HIS FATE: TO BEGIN ALL OVER AGAIN!

FROM TIME IMMENORIAL MAN HAS TRIED IN VAIN TO PIERCE THE FUTURE. BUT MAX BRONISLAW, WORLD RENOWNED CYBERNETIC GENIUS, WOULD NOT ACCEPT DEFEAT. HE STOOD ON THE VERY BRINK OF DISCOVERY AND NOTHING ON EARTH OR IN HEAVEN WOULD FORCE HIM TO GIVE UP. YET, WHEN HE HAD BROKEN PAST THE GREAT TIME BARRIER, HE WAS FILLED WITH LOATHING AND HORROR. BUT IT WAS FATED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO TURNING BACK, FOR HE HAD SEEN THE FUTURE THROUGH . . . THE CRYSTAL HELL.



MAX BRONISLAW HAD LONG WRESTLED IN VAIN WITH THE PROBLEM OF PENETRATING THE FUTURE. ONE DAY WHEN HE THOUGHT HE HAD THE PROBLEM OF THE TIME BARRIER LICKED . . .

THIS IS CERTAINLY THE GREATEST MECHANICAL BRAIN EVER MADE. HOW DO YOU INTEND TO TEST IT?

WITH THIS FORMULA, DR. SIMMONS! WHEN FED INTO THE MACHINE, IT SHOULD GIVE US A PICTURE OF THE WORLD TWO THOUSAND YEARS FROM NOW!

DIALS WERE TURNED, SWITCHES THROWN AS THE FORMULA WAS FED INTO THE MACHINE . . .

MAX, LOOK! THE MACHINE REJECTS YOUR FORMULA! IT CAN'T BE DONE!

NO, GIVE IT A CHANCE! IT NEEDS MORE TIME FOR CALCULATIONS!



BUT THE MECHANICAL BRAIN HAD TRIED ITS UTMOST, AND WHEN PUSHED TO ITS LIMIT...

YOU'VE OVERTAXED IT, MAX, LOOK OUT!

AAARRH,
I'VE FAILED,
FAILED FIVE
YEARS OF WORK
WASTED ON THIS
STUPID MACHINE.

MAX, WHAT ARE YOU
GOING TO DO WITH
THAT HAMMER?

I'VE WASTED A WHOLE LIFE-
TIME PLAYING WITH TOYS,
AND I HAVEN'T ACHIEVED MY
DREAM/I HATE EVERY ONE I
EVER INVENTED. BEFORE I
LEAVE HERE I'LL MAKE JUNK
OUT OF THEM!

MAX'S RAGE WAS TOO GREAT TO STOP...

NO, YOU MUSTN'T!/ NOBODY CAN REBUILD THEM!/ YOU'RE PUTTING SCIENCE BACK TWENTY YEARS!/

THAT'S NOT MY CONCERN/SCIENCE WILL GET ALONG WITHOUT THEM!/ DON'T TRY TO STOP ME!

NOT UNTIL EVERY MACHINE HAD BEEN DESTROYED DID MAX LEAVE THE LABORATORY FOR HIS HOME...

HOW STUPID I WAS TO ATTEMPT THE IMPOSSIBLE/ TO GLIMPSE THE FUTURE THROUGH A FORMULA, YET THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY-NOT THROUGH AN EQUATION FIT ONLY FOR THE FIRE!

Suddenly as flames caught the paper . . .

WHY...? THE FLAMES ARE SHOOTING RIGHT OUT OF THE FIREPLACE! THE WHOLE ROOM WILL CATCH FIRE!

BUT MAX WAS EVEN MORE STARTLED BY THE FLAMES' TRANSFORMATION. . .

WHO-WHAT ARE YOU?

HAVE NO FEAR, MAX BRONISLAW!/ YES, YOU ARE WELL KNOWN TO ME! IT WAS YOUR FORMULA WHICH SUMMONED NATAS FROM THE WORLD OF THE FLAMES TO PUT HIM COMPLETELY IN YOUR POWER! YOU MAY HAVE ANY WISH YOU WANT.

YOU CERTAINLY LOOK LIKE AN UNEARTHLY CREATURE! TELL ME, ARE THERE NO RESTRICTIONS? CAN I HAVE ANY WISH I WANT? IS THERE ANYTHING I MUST DO FOR YOU?

NOTHING! I AM HERE TO SERVE YOU, PROVIDED WHAT YOU CHOSE BRINGS FULFILLMENT. IF YOU DON'T ACHIEVE HAPPINESS, WELL... THEN I'M RELEASED AND YOU MUST DO AS I SAY! DON'T RUSH! THINK IT OVER!

A SILENT WITNESS ASSESSED THE MORTAL DANGER
BUT COULD NEITHER WARN NOR COUNSEL...

I CAN'T LOSE! MY
GREATEST HAPPINESS
LIES IN THE FUTURE!
IF NATAS GRANTS MY
WISH, I'LL NEVER
REGRET IT! YES, YES
I'LL DO IT!

THINK, MAX BRONISLAW!
NO MAN HAS BEEN
AFFORDED SIGHT OF THE
FUTURE! THERE ARE GOOD
REASONS FOR THIS!

I HAVE DECIDED, NATAS,
AND ACCEPT THE TERMS
OF YOUR BARGAIN. I
WANT TO SEE THE FUTURE
...YES, THE PERFECT
BEAUTY OF THE FUTURE!

VERY WELL, THEN. THE
BARGAIN MUST BE
SEALED IN BLOOD. HOLD
UP YOUR ARM! COME
CLOSER! THE WORLD OF
THE FUTURE AWAITS YOU!

NOW THERE IS NO TURNING BACK!
TO PEER INTO WHAT IS NOT PERMITTED
ANY MORTAL, IS TO INVITE
DISASTER!

NOW STARE INTO
THE CRYSTAL! CON-
CENTRATE...AND
SOON THE FUTURE
YOU HAVE CHOSEN
WILL MATERIALIZE!

MY HEAD! I'M
BEGINNING TO GET
DIZZY! THE
CRYSTAL IS
GETTING LARGER
AND LARGER!

THROUGH THE ENVELOPING
MIST MAX SAW THE MURKY
OUTLINES OF A NEW WORLD...

WHERE AM I? IF ONLY
THIS HAZE WOULD CLEAR!
AAAH... NOW I CAN SEE!
JUST AHEAD! IT IS A
FUTURE WORLD!

HE CAME TO FULL CONSCIOUSNESS AMID CHEERS AND
DAZZLING BEAUTY...

MAX BRONISLAW, AS MATHEMATICAL
GENIUS OF THE FIRST ORDER, YOU HAVE
BEEN CHOSEN TO JUDGE THIS CONTEST
OF THE BEAUTIES OF THE UNIVERSE.
AS REWARD FOR YOUR GREAT WORK,
THE ONE YOU CHOOSE SHALL
BECOME YOUR WIFE.

I CAN SEE THAT
A DECISION WILL
BE DIFFICULT!

AFTER LONG STUDY, MEASUREMENT AND
CONTEMPLATION...

THIS ONE STANDS OUT
IN ALL RESPECTS! I CHOOSE
HER, FOR SHE EXEMPLIFIES
PERFECT BEAUTY!

YOU HAVE MADE
AN EXCELLENT
CHOICE! AND IN
ACCORDANCE
WITH OUR CUSTOM
WE SHALL HOLD A
PUBLIC CEREMONY!

SO MAX WAS MARRIED IN THE YEAR 3310 TO THE PERFECT BEAUTY, MISS UNIVERSE.

SO BY THE POWERS OF THE WORLD STATE INVESTED IN ME, I PRONOUNCE YOU MAN AND WIFE!

RAY!
HURRAH!
HURRAH!

SEVERAL DAYS LATER, MAX BEGAN TO LEARN THAT BEAUTY WAS ONLY SKIN DEEP . . .

WHAT KIND OF MEAL IS THIS? EVERYTHING IS BURNED AND TASTELESS! HAVEN'T YOU EVER LEARNED TO COOK?

NO, DEAR!

YES,
DEAR!

DO YOU CALL YOURSELF THE IDEAL WIFE FOR A GREAT SCIENTIST? THERE ISN'T A SINGLE THING I CAN SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT. A WEEK HAS PASSED AND I HAVEN'T GOTTEN A SINGLE THOUGHT OUT OF THAT BIRD BRAIN OF YOURS!



YES, DEAR! NO, DEAR! YES, DEAR! I'LL GO MAD! I'LL THROTTLE YOU IF I HEAR IT ONCE MORE! FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, ISN'T THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN SAY?

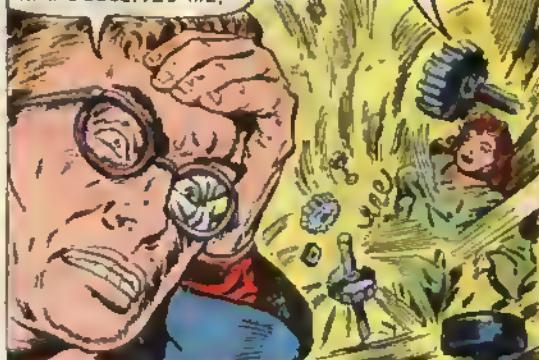
NO,
DEAR!



IN MADDENED FURY, MAX FLUNG HIS THING OF BEAUTY TO THE GROUND WITH VIOLENT FORCE . . .

AARRH! IT ISN'T A WOMAN I MARRIED, BUT A THING, A ROBOT! NO, NO, THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANTED! NATAS DECEIVED ME!

YES, DEAR! NO, DEAR!
YES, DEAR!
NO, DEAR!
YES, DEAR!



AND AS THE WORDS OF DISCONTENT AND BITTERNESS LEFT HIS LIPS . . .

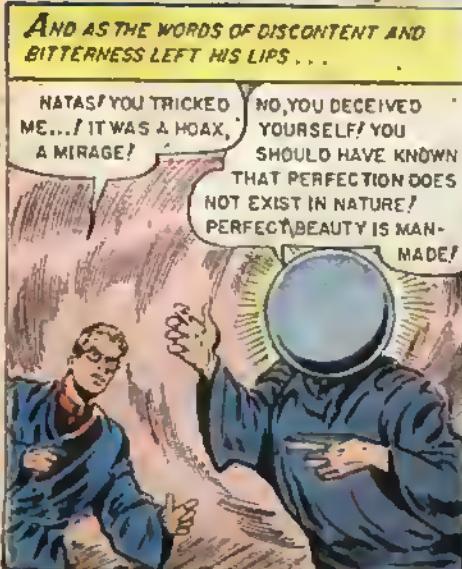
NATAS! YOU TRICKED ME... IT WAS A HOAX, YOURSELF! YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT PERFECTION DOES NOT EXIST IN NATURE! PERFECT BEAUTY IS MAN-MADE!

NO, YOU DECEIVED ME! YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT PERFECTION DOES NOT EXIST IN NATURE! PERFECT BEAUTY IS MAN-MADE!

YOU NOW HAVE TWO CHOICES LEFT IN THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE! WHAT SHALL IT BE, BRONISLAW? OR ARE YOU ALREADY RESIGNED TO DEFEAT?

DEFEAT, NO! I MADE A WRONG CHOICE. THE FUTURE WILL TRAFFIC IN POWER! YES, GIVE ME A POSITION OF GREAT POWER IN THE WORLD OF TOMORROW!

A CHOICE AS STUPID AS THE FIRST ONE! THE CARDS OF THE EVIL ONE ARE MARKED, AND ONLY HE CAN WIN!



AGAIN THE CENTURIES SPED BY IN A SWIRLING MIST AND AS THE HAZE SLOWLY CLEARED . . .

YOUR WISH IS GRANTED! COMMANDER BRONISLAW, YOU ARE IN GARRISON B, ON GUAM, DEFENSE CENTER OF THE PACIFIC. THE YEAR IS 5731.



THOSE BOMBS ARE GETTING TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT! EVEN TWO HUNDRED FEET UNDER ROCK IS NO PROTECTION! WHAT'S THE LATEST FROM THE ENEMY?

ENEMY GARRISON A HAS FALLEN, COMMANDER! NO FURTHER COMMUNICATIONS, SIR!

ENEMY GARRISON B AND C ARE DEAD... NO REPORT, COMMANDER!



AND HOURS LATER...

BOMBS HAVE DESTROYED ALL ENEMY INSTALLATIONS! WE'VE RECEIVED NO ANSWER TO PEACE DEMANDS FROM THEM AND OUR OWN FORCES ARE SILENT! WHAT DOES IT MEAN, SIR?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? YOU IDIOTS... IT MEANS VICTORY, COMPLETE VICTORY, AND WE ALONE HAVE SURVIVED! LOCK THE CONTROL BOARDS. IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE!



ONE BY ONE, HIS STAFF TURNED, UNTIL MAX UNDERSTOOD THE NATURE OF HIS HOLLOW VICTORY. . .

CELEBRATE, SIR? REMEMBER, WE CAN'T LEAVE! THE AIR IS DEADLY WITH RADIATION!

WE ARE THE ONLY ONES LEFT, SIR!

AAAARRRRH....! MECHANISMS NOT MEN! THEN I'M DOOMED TO LIVE OUT MY LIFE WITH MACHINES! I'M CAUGHT LIKE A RAT IN A TRAP! NO, NO I'D RATHER DIE!



BUT DEATH WOULD NOT COME SO READILY... THERE WAS STILL NATHAS TO CONSIDER. . .

WILL THE FUTURE ALWAYS BE MECHANISTIC AND DESTRUCTIVE? IS THERE NO DISTANT AGE WHERE I CAN FIND HAPPINESS?

YOU STILL HAVE ANOTHER CHOICE, BRONISLAW! PERHAPS THE LAST ONE WILL FULFILL ALL YOUR DESIRES!



THEN TRANSPORT ME TO AN AGE WHERE ALL WARS HAVE CEASED AND MAN HAS GROWN SIMPLE AGAIN. AN ERA OF PEACE!

IT SHALL BE DONE. GAZE WITHOUT FEAR INTO THE CRYSTAL OF THE FUTURE!



FOR BRONISLAW THERE WILL BE NO PEACE IN ANY AGE, EVEN IN ETERNITY!

BEHOLD THE FUTURE, MAX BRONISLAW!

I—I SEE A WORLD OF UTTER PRIMITIVENESS... NO CITIES, NO MACHINES. ALL THESE HAVE DIED. WHY, IT'S LIKE THE ANCIENT WORLD OF THE PAST!



THE FUTURE HAD COME FULL CYCLE AND MERGED WITH THE PAST. WHAT WAS LEFT OF MAN WAS BEGINNING THE LONG CLIMB TO CIVILIZATION AGAIN...

COME, THIS IS A FRESH TRACK! WE WILL SOON HAVE MEAT!

SEE, I TELL YOU, THERE IS A DEVIL IN HIM! WHY CAN HE ALWAYS FIND MEAT WHEN WE CAN'T!



IT WAS MAX'S FULLY DEVELOPED BRAIN THAT MADE HIM MORE THAN A MATCH FOR FEROCIOUS BEASTS...

WHY DIDN'T WE THINK OF THAT? ALONE, HE HAS KILLED ENOUGH MEAT FOR OUR WHOLE TRIBE!

HE MUST BE THE SON OF THE FOREST DEMON! WE MUST BE CAREFUL OR HE WILL KILL US LIKE THAT WILD BEAST!



SUSPICION HUNG ON EACH MIRACLE MAX ACCOMPLISHED AS THE PRIMITIVE GROUP PLODDED HOME THROUGH THE SNOW STORM...

IT IS THIS WAY TO THE CAVE! I REMEMBER THOSE TREES AND MARKERS. HURRY, BEFORE WE FREEZE!

ONLY A DEMON COULD LEAD US THROUGH THIS STORM. I TOLD YOU WHEN THIS STRANGER CAME HE WAS EVIL!



ONCE IN THEIR CAVE, MAX'S STRANGE BEHAVIOR WAS WATCHED WITH OPEN HOSTILITY...

WE DON'T HAVE TO BE COLD! A FIRE WILL SOON WARM THE CAVE!



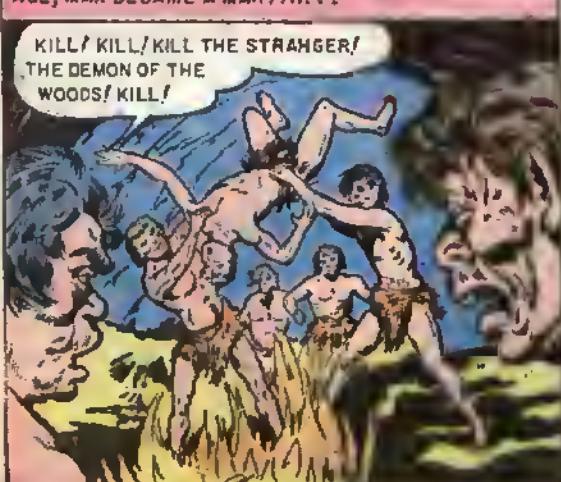
THERE IS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF! COME HERE! THE FIRE WILL WARM YOUR BONES!

NO! NO! NEVER! I TOLD YOU HE WAS A DEVIL! HE MAKES DANCING LIGHT COME OUT OF LEAVES AND WOOD! I SAY KILL!



SO LIKE MANY MEN IN ADVANCE OF THEIR PARTICULAR AGE, MAX BECAME A MARTYR...

KILL! KILL! KILL THE STRANGER! THE DEMON OF THE WOODS! KILL!



YAAAAAH!
YAAAAAH!
THE DEMON DIES! YAAAAAH!

NO! NO! NATAS HELP ME! TAKE ME BACK!



THE CALL WAS ANSWERED, AND BEFORE THE BEWILDERED EYES OF THE PRIMITIVE MEN . . .

AGAIN TIME WAS BRIDGED AND MAX RETURNED TO THE WORLD OF THE PRESENT. . . .

I IMPLORE YOU,
NATAS, RESCIND THE
BARGAIN! LET ME
LIVE MY OWN LIFE!
I WANT NO MORE
OF THE FUTURE!

TOO LATE, BRONISLAW! YOU
WILL ED THE AGREEMENT
AND SIGNED IT IN BLOOD!
I CANNOT CANCEL A LINE.
LOOK UPON ME AND LEARN
YOUR FATE!

Y!!! THE CRYSTAL IS
SHATTERING/ WITH WHOM
DID I MAKE THIS HORRIBLE
BARGAIN/

YOU SHALL SOON KNOW!
THE EVIL ONE HAS MANY
NAMES AND MANY WAYS TO
TRAP HIS VICTIMS.

HATAS! NO, NO!
I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN
IT WAS SATAN, THE
OVERLORD OF EVIL!

COME, THERE
IS NO ESCAPE!
THE BARGAIN
MUST BE KEPT!
A GREAT TASK
AWAITS YOU,
FOR ETERNITY,
HA HA HA!

SAVE ME!
SAVE ME!
I BURN!
EEEYYAA!

BRONISLAW
PURCHASED HIS
OWN NICHE IN
HELL! LET US
SEE WHAT
DESTINY
AWAITS HIM!

MASTER TECHNICIAN? GENIUS?
YET A SIMPLE JIGSAW ELUDES
HIM. MAX WILL NEVER FIT THE
PIECES TOGETHER. . .

HE REJECTED HIS OWN
WORLD WHICH MIGHT HAVE
BROUGHT HIM HAPPINESS
FOR ONE WHERE THERE IS
NOTHING BUT ETERNAL
AGONY AND PAIN!

THE
—END

THE GRENOBLE CURSE

It was a long, wide marble staircase, befitting a great chateau, and though across its steps had trod many historic events, it had never until now been the direct cause of death. Now the Comte de Grenoble lay at its foot, his body bent and twisted, blood streaming from a great gash in his head. But when his young wife Denise, screaming to rouse the servants, rushed down to where she had pushed him, the last of life had not yet fled his body.

"You—you shouldn't have done it, Denise," he groaned. "I am old . . . my time would soon have come. You could have waited." His jaw sagged, and she thought he had breathed his last. But with effort he opened his eyes; his voice was a strangled whisper. "Now the curse is upon you," he said. "Now you will suffer the Grenoble Curse."

"Fool!" she spat at him. "Old two-horned fool! I'm glad I did it!"

But the Comte de Grenoble could not hear.

He was buried with ceremony in the family crypt, the young and beautiful Denise put on widow's black, and she retired to her chambers, refusing to come out, even for meals. "How hard she takes it," everybody whispered, but in her rooms the Comtesse paced back and forth restlessly. Seven days after the Comte had died, she could stand it no longer.

"Martel," she said to the butler when he brought in her morning coffee, "distribute this money to all the servants and have everybody out by noon. I am closing the chateau today. My grief is too great here where my happiness was."

And at noon, when the door closed behind Martel, the last to go, Denise took off her widow's weeds, dressed herself in a sprightly Jacques Fath traveling suit, and hung a colored handkerchief in her bedroom window.

The night was as dark as she'd hoped it would be, but she waited impatiently. At ten o'clock a car, its headlights dimmed, drove up the graveled drive, and Denise ran quickly downstairs and threw wide the door.

"I thought you'd never come," she said, lifting her mouth for a kiss.

"Fortunately, a dark night," the man said. "No one will see us go."

At his words, she turned her head quickly, offering only her cheek. "I hope I have not made a mistake in you," she said. She measured him coolly.

"Remy Freneau," she said, as if itemizing a bill of accounts, "gentleman, handsome as the devil . . . but destitute! And cautious as a lamb. Don't you know, you handsome idiot, there isn't a soul within half a mile?"

She led him upstairs to her chambers, pointed to the four suitcases packed and ready.

"Do you have . . . everything?" he said.

"Everything," she smiled. "Every sapphire, emerald, diamond. Every bracelet, ring, necklace. Every valuable paper, deed, stock. We shall go to Paris and every night drink a toast to the Grenoble wealth—and every night jeer at his curse."

"Curse?" said Remy, blanching.

"This is the twentieth century, idiot," Denise said. "The old goat had to have his dying joke. Now take the bags."

He bent, grasped with each hand a bag—and stopped suddenly. "What's that?" he whispered. "I thought the servants were all gone." He bit his lip. "Again. Someone laughing . . . across the hall."

"It's only our imaginations working overtime. Come, I will show you." But before she opened the door across the hall, she turned. "Remember," she whispered, "I did the deed. But your hand urged mine." And she opened the door to the Comte's chambers.

"See," she said. "Nobody here. Besides, voices in the night cannot harm us."

"Wait!" His hand fell on her arm. "I thought you took all the jewels."

"I combed every inch of this—" She stopped as her eye fell to where he pointed. A book, a heavy Morocco-bound tome, yellow with age, sat on the Comte's desk. On its cover gleamed a cluster of rubies and emeralds. "This—" she breathed, "this wasn't here an hour ago. I swear it."

His voice was harsh. "Then let's go."

"No! I killed for this! I won't let hallucinations or a magician's trickery stop me now!" she strode to the desk, tried to dislodge the jewels from the book. "They won't budge," she said; and with a frantic pull tore off the cover.

"We can put it in the suitcase, Remy. It will lie flat. Come—what . . . what is it?"

"Look," he said, and put his handkerchief to his forehead. "Read."

She stood by his side and they read together the words on the flyleaf page opposite the torn cover:

Whoever brings harm to the Grenoble heir
Will worse than the victim finally fare.
And after he lies in his grave a week,
He'll return from the grave, vengeance to wreak.

For Grenoble blood, when shed in the land,
Will not wash off the killer hand.

"Wonderful!" Denise murmured. "More jewels
—more riches!"

"What are you talking about?" Remy's voice
was hoarse. "We should get out . . . The curse!"

"Every old family has legends," she said, pressing
his arm! "It's nothing. Seven hundred years
ago, the first Comte de Grenoble befriended an
itinerant sorcerer—hid him from the enraged
townspeople. And he repaid with stupid doggerel.
Every old family has these tales. The old goat of a
Comte told me about it on our wedding day. That's
nothing—but this . . .!" She pointed to the crude
diagram below the curse. "Do you know what this
is?" She flipped the page, scanned the lines hur-
riedly. "An inventory!" she breathed. "Enough
jewels for a king's ransom. And the diagram—
that's the vault! I have never been below—but the
diagram is clear. Clear enough for a child."

But Remy stood tense. "I say we depart—now.
We have enough now."

Denise's eyes were shining. "One never has
enough of jewels, darling." She took his hand. "Do
you know what this means, Remy? Can you con-
ceive of such riches? All there in the vault—for
us!"

"You will destroy us," Remy said. "Your greed
will be our undoing!"

"Now you're being silly, Remy. And I don't like
you to be silly. To plan death—and to be afraid
of a sorcerer's verse, seven hundred years old. That
is being very silly, Remy." She tore out the page
with the diagram. "Come, we shall go down to the
vault."

Muttering under his breath, Remy followed her.
"Take candles, dear," she said.

He found candles, and when they reached the
cellar door he lighted them, for belowstairs there
was no wiring for bulbs. He held the candles high
as they walked down the stone steps, their heels
clanking on the ancient masonry. The stone walls
were damp; the entire belowground had the fetid,
musty smell of cold, sealed earth and stoneworks
that have not known sunlight or clear air for ages.
Remy shuddered.

"I wish we were out of here," he said.

"Soon, darling, soon. And rich as moguls."

The light flickered. The sound of Remy's heels
stopped.

"Over here, dear," she said. "That grilled door

there: Yes—that's it!" She turned when there was
no sound. She saw Remy standing stiffly, his head
bent, peering at his palms. Her voice suddenly
touched a note of clamor, "What is it?" She came
back to him. "What is it, Remy?"

Relief crossed his features. "N—nothing. Only for
a moment I thought—"

"Thought what, Remy?"

"The—the curse. Blood on the hand."

She smiled. "Now you see. It's all nonsense, as
I said."

Again they went forward. They stopped before
the grilled door. There were no keys, but it opened
to their touch. Their breathing became sharp.

"There," she said. "The fourth stone block. It
comes out."

She held the candles while he tugged. The stone
was clammy, but loose, and when it came out the
stones next above and on either side of it were
dislodged also. Within the wall was a deep vault,
and within the vault a metal box. He reached for it.

"Don't stop now," she said. "You can't—What
is it, Remy?"

"The—the voice. I thought—"

"You're mad," she said. But her eyes were wide.

He pulled out the box and it opened and within
lay a tyrant's dream. Denise uttered a moan and
dipped her hands, and jewels cascaded through her
fingers like multi-colored bubbles. "A continent!"
she gasped. "A world—a world of jewels! Oh,
Remy!"

Then suddenly, with a deep sigh, her body stiff-
ened. There was no ignoring the sound now. A soft
bewildered cackle of laughter. And something that
sounded like a clinking of hard metal pieces. Coins
or perhaps keys.

"Remy!" It burst out of her in a shriek.

They turned toward each other, clasped hard.
There could be no doubt. The chuckling was eerie
in the dark gloom. And again there was the tink-
ling, the clinking of— Suddenly, as if on a com-
mon impulse, they rushed for the grilled door. But
it would not open. It was as if a force held it on
the other side. And as Denise and Remy pushed,
sweating, the clinking of keys sounded again—and
then the harsh, grating sound as of a lock being
turned. Remy banged furiously at the grill and
after a while he began to yell. But Denise said
tonelessly, "Not a soul within half a mile!"

And they looked at each other, and at the door
through which they could not pass, and, in the
waning light of the candles, their eyes turned
simultaneously to their hands, on which a bright
red stain was slowly beginning to spread . . .

THRUST of a GHOST LANCE

INHUMAN FIEND, WHY
HAVE YOU DESTROYED
MY GREAT ARMS COL-
LECTION? WHO ARE YOU
WHO DARES TEST THE
POWERS OF THE HOUSE
OF TURINO?

I AM DUKE MALVO, UNCLE TO THIS
ROTTEN LINE, WHICH IN DEATH I VOWED
TO DESTROY! THE GRAVE CANNOT HOLD
ME UNTIL THE LAST TURINO'S BLOOD
IS SPILLED!

FOR SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS THE
ARMORERS OF THE HOUSE OF TURINO
HAD PROSPERED WHILE EUROPE BLED.
DOWN THE CENTURIES EACH TURINO
WAS, LIKE HIS PREDECESSOR,
UNSCRUPULOUS, SELLING DEFECTIVE
WEAPONS EVEN TO HIS OWN COUNTRY-
MEN. CURSED BY MILLIONS, THE
TURINOS LIVED ON, GORGED WITH
WEALTH, NO CRACK APPEARING IN
THE MIGHTY FORTRESS THEY HAD
BUILT... UNTIL COUNT LUIGI, THE
COLLECTOR, REIGNED. THEN FATE
ENTERED TO UNLOCK A CENTURIES'-
OLD CURSE WHICH RIPPED FROM AH
UNTIMELY GRAVE... THE KNIGHT IN
ROTTED ARMOR.

IT WAS RIGHT AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR
WHEN THE FIRST DIRE EVENTS OCCURRED
WHICH ROCKED THE HOUSE OF TURINO...

DOWN WITH THE TURINOS, THE BLOOD SUCKERS!
THE ROTTEN PROFITEERS! PAY FOR OUR
INJURIES, YOU SABOTEURS! TRAITORS!

THE ENRAGED EX-SOLDIERS, HAINED BY
FAULTY TURINO WEAPONS, HAD COME
SEEKING INDEMNITIES, BUT INSTEAD, RECEIVED...

THERE'S THAT DEVIL
HIMSELF, COUNT LUIGI!
HE'S RESPONSIBLE FOR
OUR INJURIES! TEAR
HIM APART!

BACK, YOU SWINE!
DRIVE THEM OUT OF
THE VILLA, GUARDS!
SHOOT TO KILL IF
NECESSARY!



FATHER, IS IT TRUE? WERE THESE WEAPONS WE MADE REALLY FAULTY?

IT COULD NOT BE HELPED! THE MATERIALS WERE BAD! BUT IT WAS

NO MORTAL KNOWS THE FUTURE! MAN MAKES BUT KNOWS NOT HIS FATE!

WAR! A FEW MORE OR LESS KILLED DON'T MATTER! WHAT DOES MATTER IS THE GREAT HOUSE OF TURINO! AND YOU, MY SON, SHALL SOME DAY BE IT'S MASTER!



BUT NELLO COULD NOT FORGET AND IN ANGRY OUTBURST...

I AM NOT INTERESTED IN THIS STUPID COLLECTION! I AM ASHAMED THAT MY NAME IS TURINO! I WILL NOT SUCCEED YOU!

NELLO, MY SON, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? DO YOU WANT TO KILL ME? OH, MY HEART! I FEEL A STROKE COMING ON!



THE FAKE HEART ATTACK HAD THE DESIRED EFFECT...

I—I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT YOU! NO, FORGET WHAT I SAID! I WILL NOT DESERT YOU, EVER!

MY SON... I HAVEN'T LONG TO LIVE! YOU MUST BECOME MASTER OF TURINO! NOW TAKE ME TO THE CASTLE! IT WILL EASE THE PAIN TO SEE HOW THE CONSTRUCTION WORK IS GOING ON!



WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT THAT THE CASTLE BE REBUILT? NO ONE WILL EVER LIVE IN THAT ROCK PILE!

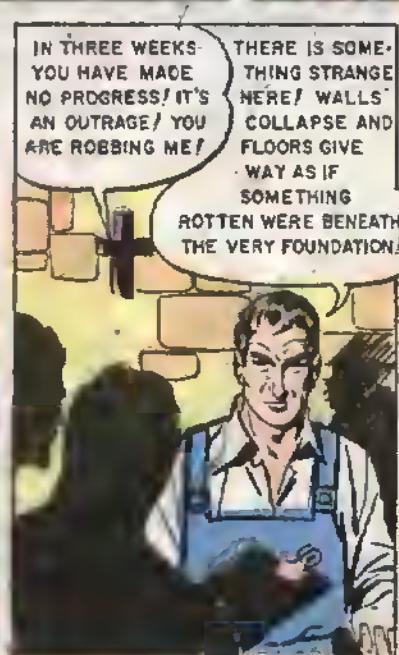
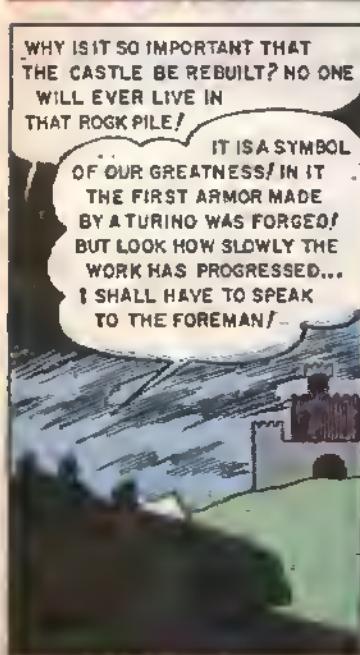
IT IS A SYMBOL OF OUR GREATNESS! IN IT THE FIRST ARMOR MADE BY A TURINO WAS FORGED! BUT LOOK HOW SLOWLY THE WORK HAS PROGRESSED... I SHALL HAVE TO SPEAK TO THE FOREMAN!

IN THREE WEEKS YOU HAVE MADE NO PROGRESS! IT'S AN OUTRAGE! YOU ARE ROBBING ME!

THERE IS SOMETHING STRANGE HERE! WALLS COLLAPSE AND FLOORS GIVE WAY AS IF SOMETHING ROTTEN WERE BENEATH THE VERY FOUNDATION!

BACK! THE WALLS ARE FALLING!

AAA!!! THERE ARE THREE WORKMEN INSIDE! THEY'LL BE CRUSHED TO DEATH! THE DEVIL HIMSELF MUST BE IN THAT CASTLE!



AS THE DUST SETTLED, COUNT LUIGI STOOD TRANFIGURED, FOR HE ALONE SAW THE VISION...

STOP TRYING TO REBUILD THE CASTLE! IT WILL NEVER STAND! IT WILL NEVER STAND! IT ROTS AT THE FOUNDATION, JUST LIKE THE HOUSE OF TURINO FOR THE CRIMES IT HAS COMMITTED!

AAARRH! WHAT DOES IT MEAN—THAT HORRIBLE SPECTRE'S WARNING? NELLO, NELLO, COME BACK! MY HEART!

IT IS YOUR OWN ACTS COMING BACK TO PLAGUE YOU!

WHILE THE COUNT LAY IN A COMA...

I KNOW THAT ARTURO WAS WORKING DOWN HERE! WE MUST CLEAR THIS WHOLE DUNGEON, CARLO!

LOOK WHAT WE DUG UP! THE COUNT WILL PAY A NICE BONUS FOR THAT SUIT OF ARMOR!

AS THE RUBBLE WAS CLEARED AWAY...

AAAHH, MY BONES ARE WEARY FROM LYING HERE ALL THOSE CENTURIES! WHERE IS THE COUNT? BRING HIM HERE AT ONCE!

EEEEE! BY MY SOUL, THE IRON MAN MOVES! HE SPEAKS! CARLO RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

BY THIS TIME, THE COUNT HAD RECOVERED SUFFICIENTLY TO SNEER AT THE WILD STORY...

I SWEAR BY MY NAME THE IRON MAN MOVED AND SPOKE!

BAH, YOU ARE LIKE OLD WOMEN! SEE, THERE HE LIES! WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL! FIND FOR MY MUSEUM!

AND HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE FRESH BLOOD ON HIS CHEST, YOUR EXCELLENCY?

UMMM... IT IS SIMPLE! ONE OF YOU MUST HAVE CUT HIMSELF! THERE IS NO OTHER REASON. THIS SUIT OF ARMOR IS SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS OLD! LOAD IT INTO MY CAR AND TAKE IT TO THE MUSEUM!

IN THE MUSEUM WORKSHOP SEVERAL HOURS LATER, WHEN THE ARMOR WAS UNFASTENED...

I SHOULD SAY, YOUR EXCELLENCY, THAT THIS IS THE VERY EARLIEST ARMOR MADE BY YOUR ANCESTORS. A RARE FINO! WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE BONY ONE?

BURY HIM IN OUR OWN CEMETERY. HE MAY BE ONE OF MY OWN ANCESTORS! AND I WANT THAT SUIT OF ARMOR CLEANED, POLISHED AND PLACED IN THE MUSEUM TOMORROW!

THE FOLLOWING DAY WHEN THE COUNT MADE HIS INSPECTION TOUR...

AAH, THERE IT IS! THEY WORKED ALL NIGHT TO PUT IT IN SHAPE... MY EYES ARE WEAK—I MUST GET CLOSER!

BRUNO, EZIO...MAY YOUR SOULS ROT! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE HERE? WHAT KIND OF JOKE IS THIS?

WHAT IS WRONG, COUNT LUIGI?

THE DEVIL MUST BE IN THAT ARMOR! OUT, OUT! LIARS! SCOUNDRELS! WE SWEAR WE SPENT TEN HOURS SCRAPING AND POLISHING? IT SHONE LIKE A MIRROR! FINISHED HERE! IF YOU SNOW YOUR FACES AT VILLA TURINO, I'LL HAVE YOUR BONES BROKEN!

SUDDENLY, AS THE COUNT HALTED HIS PURSUIT OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM...

NOW WHAT? IT SOUNDS LIKE A BATTLE IS TAKING PLACE IN THE MUSEUM! IF THOSE WRETCHES HAVE COMMITTED MORE SABOTAGE, I'LL—

BRANG!
KRAASH!
KRAASH!

AND RUNNING INSIDE...

BY ALL THE SAINTS...MY MUSEUM IS BEING DESTROYED, BY THAT— THAT CURSED SUIT OF ARMOR! HALT, ENOUGH! FIEND OR DEVIL, WHO ARE YOU?

I AM DUKE MALVO, THE UNCLE OF THE FIRST TURINO ARMORER...THE FIRST OF THE WHOLE MURDEROUS LINE, OF WHICH YOU SHALL BE THE LAST! DO YOU KNOW HOW IN THE DIM PAST YOUR BLOODY ANCESTOR SEIZED MY INHERITANCE? LISTEN!

IT WAS THE EVE OF ST. CECILIA'S DAY, TWELVE HUNDRED AND FORTY SIX. MY NEPHEW LORENZO WAS FINISHING MY SUIT OF ARMOR FOR THE TOURNAMENT...

LORENZO, MY NEPHEW, NOTHING WILL THE ARMOR WITHSTAND THE THRUST OF A SPEAR? TOMORROW I FIGHT FOR MY LIFE IN A TOURNAMENT!

NOTHING CAN PIERCE THIS ARMOR, SIRE! YOU SHALL BE INVINCIBLE, MY UNCLE!

I WAS FIRST IN THE LISTS. MY OPPONENT WAS A DEADLY ENEMY FROM LOMBARDY...

I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR! MY ARMOR WILL TURN AWAY EVERY THRUST OF HIS SPEAR!



BUT I WAS WRONG, TERRIBLY WRONG, FOR AS WE
CROSSED LANCES...

DIE, YOU
VILLAIN!

AAARGH! I'M UNDONE!
THE ARMOR DID NOT
HOLD! THE SPEAR WENT
THROUGH LIKE PAPER...
AAAAAAH!

AND AS I LAY DYING IN MY TENT...

YES, UNCLE,
I TRICKED YOU!
I MADE YOU A SUIT OF
HALF ROTTED ARMOR!
I WANTED YOU TO DIE!
NOW THE ESTATE, THE
CASTLE, ALL YOUR
LANDS WILL BELONG
TO ME! HA HA HA!

HEAVEN CURSE
YOU AND ALL
YOUR KIND,
LORENZO! YOU
SHALL NOT ESCAPE
ME, EVEN IF I MUST
RETURN FROM THE
GRAVE TO REVENGE
MYSELF!

AND SO I HAVE RETURNED, FOR
NONE OF THE TURINOS DOWN
THROUGH THE CENTURIES HAVE
MENDED THEIR WAYS. ALL ARE
ROTTEN TO THE CORE!

IT WAS IN
YOUR POWER
TO SAVE
YOURSELF!
YOUR ACTS HAVE
CONDEMNED
YOU!

HELP! HELP!
SAVE ME!

GATHERING ALL HIS HIRELINGS, THE COUNT RETURNED
TO THE MUSEUM...

BUT, YOUR EXCELLENCY, THE
STORY YOU TELL IS
IMPOSSIBLE!

QUIET, YOU WILL
SOON SEE, FOR YOUR-
SELF! EVERY MAN ON
GUARD!

BUT NO FORCE WAS NECESSARY...

IT'S INCREDIBLE! WE BURIED THE
REMAINS OF THE STRANGE KNIGHT
AND HE RETURNED TO HIS SUIT OF
ARMOR! BUT HOW CAN A DEAD
MAN...? MY MIND
CANNOT FATHOM
IT!

I SAW THE
FIEND WITH MY
OWN EYES! I WANT HIM
BURIED, ARMOR AND
ALL, IN A TEN-FOOT
SLAB OF CONCRETE...
AT ONCE!

WHEN THE COUNT'S ORDERS WERE
FULFILLED...

ONLY SATAN
COULD BRING
HIM BACK
NOW!

NOW I FEEL
SAFE! I CAN START
PREPARING FOR THE
GREAT SEVEN HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDING OF
OUR HOUSE. I HAVE A
WONDERFUL TREAT
PLANNED FOR OUR
GUESTS!

ON THE DAY OF THE GREAT
CELEBRATION...

SO THIS IS WHY
YOU SENT ME TO
ROME FOR TWO
WEEKS! YOU'VE
TURNED THE
CLOCK BACK
SEVEN HUNDRED
YEARS! WHAT
A SPECTACLE!

YES, AND I'M
STAGING A
TOURNAMENT ON
THIS VERY FIELD,
JUST LIKE THEY
DID IN MY
ANCESTORS'
TIMES! YOU,
NELLO, WILL
WEAR THE COLORS
OF THE HOUSE
OF TURINO!

I'LL HAVE NO PART OF THIS SILLY GAME! WHY SHOULD I HONOR A LOT OF CUTTHROAT ANCESTORS? NO, I'LL NOT DO IT!

NELLO, WHEN YOU SPEAK LIKE THAT IT HURTS ME... I FEEL FAINT! OOH, MY HEART!

FRIGHTENED BY HIS FATHER'S SHAM ATTACK, NELLO RELENTED...

YES, YES, I KNOW THERE'S NO DANGER! THE SPEARS ARE PADDED! BUT THE WHOLE THING IS STUPID! I DO IT ONLY TO MAKE YOU HURRY, NELLO! HAPPY!

HURRY, NELLO! THE TRUMPET WILL SOON BE SOUNDED!

THE ASSEMBLY CALL BLARED OUT TO ANNOUNCE THE BEGINNING OF THE TOURNAMENT...



AND DEEP WITHIN THE NEARBY TURINO GRAVEYARD, A DEAD KNIGHT LISTENED AND RESPONDED...

THE ASSEMBLY CALL! I MUST ANSWER IT AND FULFILL MY DESTINY!

THE TOURNAMENT WENT ON. NELLO SCORED A VICTORY AND WAS JUST LEAVING THE FIELD, WHEN...

BRAVO, NELLO! YOU ARE A REAL KNIGHT, WORTHY OF THE TURINO NAME!

COUNT LUIGI, LOOK! THE FAR END OF THE FIELD! A STRANGE

KNIGHT IS GALLOPING THIS WAY! HE'S NOT IN THE LISTS!



LIKE A SAVAGE EXPRESS, THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR BORE DOWN ON NELLO

HIS LANCE IS NOT PADDED! HE'S OUT FOR BLOOD! STOP! STOP! I DON'T WISH TO FIGHT!

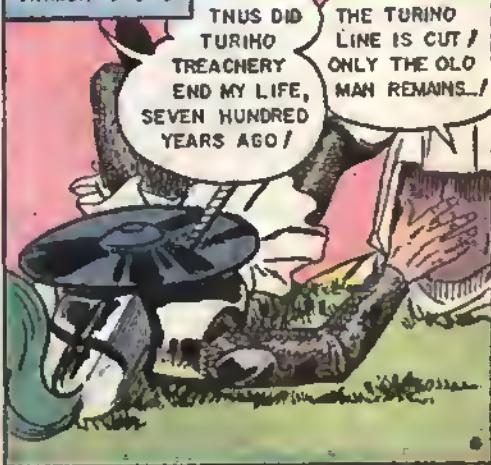
TURN AND FIGHT, YOU COWARD... OR DIE!

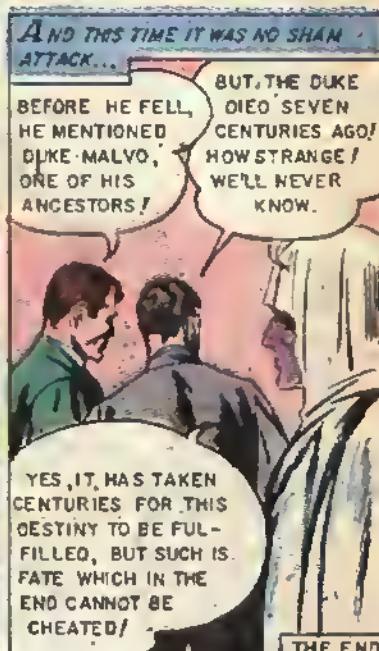
THIS IS NO SHAM BATTLE. AT STAKE IS REVENGE AND THE HOUSE OF TURINO!

SAVAGELY, THE LANCE PIERCED NELLO'S ARMOR...

THUS DID TURIHO TREACHERY END MY LIFE, SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO!

THE TURINO LINE IS CUT! ONLY THE OLD MAN REMAINS!





STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 210) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

Hand of Fate, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1953.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, A. A. Wyn, 23 West 47th St., New York 36, N. Y.; Editor, M. J. Phillips, 23 West 47th St., New York 36, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, A. A. Wyn, 23 West 47th St., New York 36, N. Y.

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A. A. WYN
(Signature of editor, publisher, business manager or owner)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 21st day of September, 1953.

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